

FREEDOM FROM THE POWER OF SIN AND GUILT

Romans 8:1–4

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Today we'll share verses 1–4.

Romans 8:1–4 (NIV)

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

Someone has remarked that if the Scriptures were a ring and Paul's letter to the Romans were a precious stone, in that ring, then, Romans 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel. This letter and this chapter 8 is a culmination of what Paul has been driving at through the letter—that Christ not only frees us from the guilt of sin, but also frees us from the power of sin. So in Romans 8 the Holy Spirit is mentioned some twenty times, emphasizing over and over that because of Christ, through God's Spirit that now dwells within us, we have the power to be victorious.

This eighth chapter begins with the statement “no condemnation in Christ.” It ends with the statement, “no separation in Christ.” And between the “no condemnation” and the “no separation,” the apostle's theme is to show us that in Christ, there is no defeat. “Therefore” is the word in which the chapter begins.

You know, that is a hinge word, a turning-point word. It means it gathers up everything that is before it and brings it to a conclusion—to something that may be logically derived from what has preceded it. Therefore.

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For example, recently I had the experience of ministering abroad. There were some conditions to be met in order for a “therefore” to take place. The conditions were these. The first condition was I needed to be invited somewhere. The second condition was I needed to be prepared to act on the invitation. If I’m invited, for example, to teach on the Book of Acts, it would be impossible for me to minister in that context if I weren’t prepared to teach. So God, through a lifetime of training and leading, had made me prepared. The third thing that must take place is the Spirit must lead so that the invitation and the agreement are secured. And the fourth thing which must take place—and did—was the congregation made it possible for me to be there. So all things together—when these four conditions were met—therefore, on May 2, I started out on the journey abroad.

Paul, in going through the letter of Romans, has reached an important point at the beginning of chapter 8 that the “therefore” is going to thrust him into a new emphasis of conclusion. As is his typical habit in writing, when he comes to a turning point he takes a few moments, so to speak, to catch his breath and gathers up in a summary way the essential thoughts he had been making up to this point—collects them very quickly, restates them, then impels us and moves us on to the new thrust which he is going to make.

I’m glad he did this at the beginning of chapter 8 because we’ve now been away from this letter for about two months, and it will be helpful for us to take a few moments to remember where we were in order to know how we got there, what we arrived at.

These four verses speak about aspects of our relationship, our relationship to God (verse 1), our relationship to sin and death (verse 2), our relationship to the law (verse 3), and our relationship to the Spirit (verse 4).

I. First, our relationship to God.

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“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ” (verse 1). This verse sums up what Paul was striving at through the first five chapters of the epistle to the Romans. The letter, in fact, began with the statement of condemnation. Now we come to “no condemnation.” But we must not forget that when we began looking at this letter, from 1:18 through 3:20 the emphasis was heavy upon condemnation. Condemnation on the nonreligious world of not meeting God’s requirements for righteousness. Condemnation on the religious world which tries to feel, on the basis of their own ability, that they’re right with God, that they do not need Christ. In fact, the person who attempts to say that they are right with God on the basis of something which they have done, or goodness which they have achieved, is trying to stand before God in a righteousness which is their own—not God’s righteousness, which is an entirely different thing. It’s a white-hot purity. It’s like comparing a match burning with a white-hot caldron furnace into which one is inserting steel to be smelted. The righteousness of God is like that smelting furnace, which is so hot that nothing impure can stand in His presence. The recognition that we have as Christians, if we’re ever to comment on the statement “there is no condemnation,” is to start off by realizing that before Christ, there *was* condemnation. We were unprepared, completely unprepared, to stand before God and to face Him.

But this righteousness of God has been revealed in Christ our Lord. He came not only to condemn sin, but He came to act on our behalf. So that in some way the justice and the mercy of God might come together—the justice of God, which demands penalty for sin, and the mercy of God, which seeks to include us in His family. Jesus, because He has come, has made it possible for us to have life. That’s why there is now no condemnation for those that are in Him.

We were driving in Israel as we were on our trip. I looked up in the electrical wires at a bird. But instead of being in the usual position that a bird is in when bird is sitting on a wire, he was underneath the wire holding on. I thought, “What a strange bird!” Then I realized the bird was

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not a living bird. He had somehow touched wires where the insulation was gone, and juice had got him and he couldn't let go. He was very much a dead bird hanging there. He had discovered a law, which is at work, which is this: When a bird, which is not properly grounded, touches a live wire, he finds that electricity is stronger than life. What is the moral of this story? When you or I touch the power of sin and death without Christ, without proper grounding, the proper insulation, we find that there is a power that is stronger than us. And it will get us every time. But I got to visualizing, what would happen if life were stronger than electricity? What would happen if that bird, ungrounded, touched those wires? Instead of the electricity being stronger than him, he was stronger than the power of the electricity. And when his feet grabbed the wire, they sapped the electricity and shorted out everything in Israel. That would really make news! Life would be stronger than electricity.

I began to picture Christ hanging on the cross. Then I pictured Him risen from the dead. What happened was He grabbed hold of the law of sin and death—which had zapped and still zaps every living human being, because every living human being finds that sin and death are stronger than themselves. Christ came and touched it and grabbed it, and the life that was in Him was stronger than anything else, and He has set all hell raging because He has power. And because of our attachment to Him, we now have no condemnation. We've been brought into relationship where sin and death have lost their hold on our lives.

This fact of not being under condemnation definitely contrasts with what we felt when we were living without Christ, when we were trying to keep God's law to satisfy Him. We saw in Romans 7 the terrible plight of the Christian who begins to try to live out his Christian life in terms of whether or not he's measuring up to God's law. He finally has to cry out as he did before he became a Christian, "O, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Because the law, since it is condemnatory in purpose, can only be saying over and over to us

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again—in spite of how much we obey its many parts—if we fail in one, the Law reminds us that we have failed. “You can’t possibly be a child of God. You can’t possibly be righteous.”

Relating to the Law, sometimes we, as Christians, don’t feel saved. Sometimes we don’t feel justified. Sometimes we feel very much condemned and really wonder if God really does accept us and love us and if we really do have salvation against the Law and against feelings. This verse comes with tremendous power, saying by the faith that we take hold of the verse with, “There is now, therefore, no condemnation.”

This Word is truer than our feelings, praise God. And it is more powerful than the Law.

Condemnation means two things. If you stood before a judge and received condemnation, it would mean that you had received a sentence: Guilty! But it also would mean that you would receive a penalty. You would then, from that sentence, move to serving out some exaction that the law required of you. Condemnation before God means a guilty sentence, and it means an exaction of a penalty: being separated from Him eternally. But if condemnation has these two spheres, justification also has these two spheres. Because you stand before God and He says, “Not guilty!” And being not guilty, you’ve got to serve Him in a new direction. So that not only does the sentence involve the idea that you have been declared not guilty, but you have been set free as well, and you have intended to be free from the power of sin in your life. Christ came to set us free from guilt and sin and the power of sin.

This factor of no condemnation in Christ definitely contrasts with the unbelieving person who has yet the day of judgment before them. For the Christian who has accepted Christ, the day of judgment has already passed.

II. The second verse talks about our relationship to sin and death.

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It summarizes what's in Romans 6. For here in Romans 6, Paul had especially dealt with the question of sin as it affects the believer's life—how it had brought death to all. He says that Christ, or the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death.

What is the law of sin and death? The law of sin and death is found in the earliest part of Scripture in Genesis 3:3, where God speaks to the first man and first woman and says that “The soul that eateth it shall die.” That's the law of sin and death. When you sin, you die. When we actually look at the account of the first man and woman, we find that the day they sinned, they did not physically die. The day they sinned, they were then separated from God's presence, which is a type of death. It's called the second death in Scripture. Then, eventually, death also worked its way out in their physical existence so they had separation from man. So the day you will sin, you will die. It was understood in the first man and woman as having spiritual significance.

If it's true that the day you sin you will die, you don't physically die but that works itself later in your existence, then the parallel is true in regard to salvation. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” So that when Christ brings life, He first of all brings it in the spiritual realm so that there is no separation from God. Just as death worked itself out in the physical dimension in respect to sin, so life in Christ will eventually work itself out in our physical existence where it will involve the physical resurrection of our body from the dead if we die in Christ. So our relationship to sin and death is over because in Christ we have been freed. Sometimes the presence of sin in the believer's life attacks his assurance. We are, therefore, to keep precisely in mind what is being taught here by the Spirit of God through the apostle. The apostle has said in Romans 6 that we have died with Christ. He does not say sin has died, and he

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does not say death has died. He says we have died, and, therefore, sin has no more power over us.

You say, “I feel very much alive. When did I die?” You died, if you are a Christian, when Christ died on the Cross. Paul says that we have died with Christ. We’ve been buried with Christ. We’re risen with Christ.

When we looked at that theme in Romans 6, I compared it to baby dedication where, when I hold an infant in my arms and dedicate that child to the Lord, they are not cognitively aware at that moment that I’m presenting them to God. You ask them twenty years later, “Do you remember that time Pastor Wood held you and dedicated you to the Lord?” They’ll say, “No, I don’t believe I remember that. But on the basis of witnesses, I’ll agree that it happened.”

In such the same way, and in like mystery—somehow stepping outside the normal processes of space and time—all who, through faith, believe in Christ are present in that moment when He died. We’re present with Him. We’re attached to His death. He presented us to God through His offering for sin. We were made acceptable in God’s eyes through His sacrifice on the cross.

We’re with Him on the cross. We’re with Him in the grave. And we’re with Him in the resurrection. So the law of the Spirit has set me free.

What is the law of the Spirit? Put a comma after the word “Spirit” and after the word “Jesus” so that the phrase is a modifying phrase. For example, the law of the Spirit. The law of the Spirit is life in Christ Jesus.

That’s the law of the Spirit. This law is stronger than the law of sin and death. It’s the life that comes through Christ’s resurrected presence. This law is greater than the sin which is in my members, and it has freed me from the law of sin and death.

Notice Paul’s careful use of tenses here. He is not saying, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *is* setting me free from sin and death.” Nor does he say “*shall* set me free from sin and

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death.” Nor does he say, “I hope it will. I’ve got my fingers crossed.” But in past tense. It’s already happened. “Freed me from the law of sin and death.” I’ve already moved beyond the power of these laws which are functioning. The new me has been made in Christ’s image. The new me—whom you can’t even see with the natural eye—but a new me, which bears the image of Christ.

If you’re in Christ, there’s a new you. It’s like putting a new motor in an old car. You still look at the old car, but anybody who watched that car drive down the street knows that it’s got to have a new motor in it. It may have some dents in the bumper, but if it’s got a new motor, it’s all the difference in the world. When Christ remade you, He put a new you in an old frame. That frame is eventually going to pass away, get a whole new model, which will be just as neat as the engine is. But in the interim we find that in this model we’re in, in our members sin still is trying to wage a foxhole warfare. But, “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We’re to recognize that sin still is trying to touch our members, but cannot affect the real you. The real you, who is made in Christ’s image, has already been set free from sin and death. There will never be a moment in which you cease to exist. Because you’re always, now, in Christ’s presence. Eternal life started the moment you accepted Jesus Christ. It’s not going to start when you die. It started when you accepted Him. In my spirit, I already bear the image of the Man of heaven. And in my body, I still bear the image of the man of earth, which is Adam. A really helpful understanding of this having been set free, or, “I was free from the law of sin and death” is this illustration. Some of you have heard it before. It’s from a book by a German theologian named Oscar Cullmann called *Christ and Time*, in which he talks about the kingdom of God. He says that Christ’s reign—or Christ’s entrance, or Christ’s kingdom—may be compared to the difference between D-Day and VE Day. He goes on to say that a war is often won at a critical turning point. There is a battle that is fought that determines the war, so that

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when historians later look back, they can say on that date the war was won. That's the way World War II was when in June of 1944. The Allies landed in Normandy Beach in France. That was the turning point which eventuated the successful outcome of the Allies in World War II so that from Normandy, the war was won because the deciding battle had been fought. Actually it was sixteen, eighteen months before Victory in Europe Day. And between D-Day and Victory in Europe Day—there were more casualties even before D-Day—but from D Day on, the war was won. It was being won. It shall be won. The three tenses could be applied to it.

That's the same as Christ in our lives. At the Cross, it was God's D-Day. The critical battle was fought. And VE Day, which is His return from glory with the saints, is sure. Because something has already happened on D-Day. There's been an invasion, and the war is won. It is being won. It shall be won. We are saved, we were saved, we are being saved, we shall be saved. All these terms could be applied. Likewise, when Christ, when His power enters our life, it is no longer a question of, "We shall be saved." But the critical battle has been fought. Satan has been defeated. Christ lives in our lives. D-Day has occurred when we were born again. And we're waiting for VE Day.

III. Verse 3 talks about our relationship to the Law.

It sums up what is in Romans 7. This verse says that Christ has done what the Law could not do, that Christ condemns sin in the flesh. There are two ways we can understand the word "condemn." Condemn can mean to disapprove, or condemn can mean to destroy. It's quite obvious that the Law disapproves of sins. But the Law could not destroy sin's power. That is the meaning of the idea of "condemn" here. For example, the Law can keep telling us that something is wrong and we shouldn't do it. But it has no power to help us to overcome what is wrong. It just keeps telling us, "You shouldn't be doing this." But Christ has the power to execute

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judgment on sin. The Law can never destroy sin's power because the Law is weakened by the flesh. That's our humanity.

The flesh here is not just our carnal, sinful nature, but the flesh is especially dealt with in Galatians 5:19 and following. It is the description of humanity apart from Christ Jesus. And all kinds of things come out of the flesh, including wrong thoughts, wrong actions, wrong motives, sins of the mind, sins of the spirit, sins of the physical flesh, and the like. So anything that's of the flesh cannot satisfy God since it's earthbound, earthly, and not heavenly. So the Law is weakened by the flesh. And the flesh—our Adam nature, which we derive by being genetically and spiritually linked to Adam—this has made it possible for sin to enter into our existence and there take up its residence.

But Christ has come, and He's superior to the Law. He is God's own Son, Paul says, to distinguish Him from us. We are God's sons and daughters, but Christ is God's Son by nature. We are God's sons by grace. He "came in the likeness of sinful flesh"—very careful wording. Paul does not say He came in sinful flesh, for Christ was without sin. And he does not say that Christ came in the likeness of flesh, for this would then make it appear that Christ only had a phantom human existence. But rather, the likeness of sinful flesh. That is, Christ came so close to touching our sinful nature that He is seen as being in the likeness—not himself a sinner, but fully human and acquainted with our griefs. And tempted as one of us would ever be tempted, or—on a more powerful level—than any of us have ever been tempted. He came to be a sacrifice for sin, thereby condemning sin in the flesh. That is to say, He overcame it in the power of the God-man that was in Him. He overcame sin and therefore destroyed it. He condemned it.

This, of course, puts Satan to silence for all eternity because he can never say that God dealt with the sin question by issuing an edict from heaven and making it fall down to earth. God dealt with it by sending His own Son, who put it away and defeated it and under the power of His

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humanity, linked with the residence of the Spirit of God in Him. It's a mystery which we don't fully expound or understand. It's designed that every mouth should be stopped, that even Satan should not accuse God of being unjust, dealing with sin simply by a decree and not by His own nature.

IV. Then we come to verse 4, which talks about our relationship with the Spirit.

Here we see Paul summarizing what is to follow in chapter 8. He is again, as he has before, addressing the issue of lawlessness. Facing the idea of a person who says, "Once we've been freed from the guilt of sin by Christ Jesus, then we can do anything we want because we're in a new relationship. So eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die!" Paul again forcefully counteracts that argument. He says that Christ condemns sin in the flesh in order that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. The just requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us because we're in relationship now to Him who has destroyed the power of sin, and it is His intention that we live pleasing before God. He has brought us into a personal relationship with God rather than a legal relationship. Before Christ, we were in a legal relationship with God. We had an inability to satisfy God's demands legally. We're all guilty. But if I break a law of the country, of the state of California or the city of Costa Mesa, that is a far different thing than violating a law within the family. For the state, because it must treat everyone alike, must exact its due sentence on me and make me do whatever anyone else would do for a penalty. Within the family, I can receive grace and pardon and restoration. So God now, through Christ, has brought us into His family. For we are not dealt with any more on the legal relationship, but on a personal relationship. Therefore, we are in union with Him and we have victory through Him.

One writer has made an illustration on how the Law is fulfilled in us through Christ. He met the just requirements of the law. He said, "A vine does not produce grapes by an act of Congress.

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Congress passes a lot of laws. But one law they cannot pass is to demand that all vines in the country grow grapes. Grapes are the fruit of the vine's own life. So the conduct which conforms to the standard of the kingdom of God is not produced by any demand, not even God's demand. But it is the fruit of that divine nature which God gives as the result of what He has done in and by Christ. Even God's demand, 'Be holy as I am holy,' does not of itself produce fruit which is right before God. It is the impartation of God's nature which allows the fruit to grow. And when we receive Christ, we receive a new nature."

In moments of application, I have deliberately in today's message talked on a doctrinal and an exponential level. Now I want to talk on the applicative level. It's important for us to grab the doctrine, but if we only grab the doctrine and don't apply it, it loses its significance and power. Sin as such is abstract term. We need to make it concrete and relate it to a specific instance. So often, the test of anything is to take its most difficult hurdle and say, "If it can meet this hurdle, then it applies across the board for everything else."

I want for a moment to apply this doctrine, which we have been espousing here in Romans 8, to a sin within our society which is receiving great publicity today. Many people feel that once you are into this sin, there is very little hope that you will be anything different than the kind of behavior that is involved in this sin. I refer to homosexuality. Our society has pretty much—and even sectors of the church have—given up, in some instances, on the idea that homosexuality is curable and God can put a new nature within a homosexual person. So that rather than seeing homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, one justifiable because there's no hope that the homosexual can ever change, we look seriously at what the gospel is teaching and hold very clear to what the gospel is calling for. That there is no sin within mankind which can defeat the power of Christ to overcome it and set that person free.

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So if there can be a victory in the area of homosexuality, I would say that across the board there can be a victory in everything. This includes habits. This includes such things as alcoholism. It includes moral sins, spiritual sins—across the board, I think, we can apply it. But I want to take homosexuality as a test case, since it's very much in the news and in our awareness these days. Does Christ free us from the guilt of sin and the power of sin? Or does He only free us from the guilt of sin? If the homosexual person comes to Christ and asks forgiveness, does God then only free that person from the guilt of being a homosexual? Or does God give them the power to be something else which is pleasing in His sight?

How do we approach that from the Scripture we've been talking about here? We have to start where Paul is starting in Romans: with the condemnation angle. For you can never get to know condemnation if you don't start where he started to recognize what sin is. If we do not take seriously the law of God, if we do not call homosexuality a sin—if we attempt to justify it by twisting Scripture or twisting logic or saying it's a legitimate lifestyle, an alternative lifestyle—then we have already defeated the possibility for change. Because we've already taken our stand in doubting what God's Word is saying. It's very clear. We are doing what was done in the garden with the man and the woman who question whether God's Word actually said, "You shall not touch. You shall not eat."

Here is where civil legislation is important in the current struggle. Because what Christians need to be involved in is saying that there is an application morally that if the Church—which is about the only sector of society which is addressing this question from a biblical perspective, a right perspective—if we abandon any attempt to say that homosexuality is wrong, it is not right, then gradually the homosexual himself gets more and more trapped. Because no one is being used with the sharp edge of the Spirit to point out that this behavior is unacceptable to God. It would be as though someone were saying alcoholism is all right, adultery is all right, idolatry is all

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right, drugs are all right, and on down the spectrum—gossip is all right, a bitter spirit is all right.

It is to abandon all moral defense.

The Law must be agreed with. There can never be salvation until we first of all agree with God's Word. But I think a second thing must be said. The Law has no power to deliver anybody.

Christians involved in the struggle ought to recognize this in their public posturing and speaking.

The perspective of the gospel is not against the homosexual person. The gospel is for any person trapped in anything. We need to recognize that we can pass laws, but the laws do not guarantee that the people will be freed or changed. Because the law does not have any capability to free anybody of anything. All the laws do is keep the pressure on and say, "This is unacceptable. This alternative behavior is not permissible." But the Law can't do a thing.

The Church will miss the boat in the era and this day. This church will miss the boat if all we do is publicly proclaim against homosexuality and do not have a message that the gospel—the power of Christ—can change any human being and bring that being into conformity with God's own image, the image of Christ Jesus. It is important, vital, to keep this perspective in the legal involvement today. Christ has come to do what the Law could never do. That's the whole purpose of Christ. He died for sin. It was my sin that took Him to the cross. Whether my sin was homosexuality or adultery or a bitter spirit or thievery or addiction or whatever it was, my sin took Him there. The Law could not deal with that. Christ dealt with it and He put it away. He delivered me first from the guilt of sin, but then—because I now identify with His life—He gives me the power over sin. I have chosen to be identified with Him, to be joined in His crucifixion and in His burial and His resurrection. I am connected with Him. The old me is gone. It died with Christ on the cross. I have a new nature, a nature which is made in Christ's own image.

If you go back to the electrocuted bird for just a minute, if you came along and grabbed hold of the electrocuted bird and you weren't properly grounded, it would get you, too. Let's suppose,

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though, that life was stronger than electricity and you grabbed hold of a bird that was stronger than electricity. The electricity wouldn't zap you. You would join the bird in zapping it.

I say our union with Christ is so intrinsic—it is so there—that even as sin and death do not zap Him any more, so also we who are joined to Him have His life in us. The old you is gone. The new you is living in a body of death which will be replaced in the age to come. But there has been a definite change to occur in your life because of Christ. To say that one can continue in a life of sin after being delivered from the guilt of sin is to deny the power of the gospel to change our lives. It'd be like saying of Saul of Tarsus after he got converted, “Brother Saul, I'm so glad that God has delivered you from the guilt of sin. The guilt of persecuting the Church. The guilt of killing Stephen. I know, Saul, you have sort of a sadistic spirit in you. And now that Christ has delivered you from the guilt of sin, we don't really expect much out of you and don't expect much to happen to you beyond going on being the same sort of sadistic person you've always been. Only now you'll be killing the other side instead of our side.”

What good is it if God's going to save from the guilt of sin if He's not going to deliver us from the power of sin and give us a new nature to love instead of to hate? How does one become free, not only from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin? How can you be free from sin's power? Here we have a unique emphasis in Paul's letter to the Romans that we may not always see in our contemporary church world today. Because immediately, as Christians, we want to come at this subject from a matter of deliverance and prayer rather than teaching. Yet Paul very much was appealing to teaching through the mind and the will—saying that if you would get the doctrine, if you would get the teaching, then prayer for deliverance would aid. But you must come at it with your mind and your will as well. You must understand the realities, which are true, which you can only grasp through faith—through holding on and belief. Therefore, this teaching is aimed at the mind and the will.

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The first line comes in at this new nature. Christ lives within you. It means you have a new self-image. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, gives a list of ten categories of sin that people in the Corinthian church were once involved in—homosexuals, adulterers, idolaters, thieves, and the like. Then he adds the classic line, “And such were some of you. But you are washed.” Notice: You were, and you are. So that when you come to Christ, it is no longer appropriate to call yourself an addict, no longer appropriate to call yourself a homosexual. You no longer call yourself anything that is inappropriate to the word “saint,” “child of God,” “born again.”

You have a new nature. Christ has done for you what He did to Simon when He first met him. He called him a new name. He said, “You’re no longer Simon, shifting sands. You’re Peter. You’re a rock.” Get that in you. I am no longer a sick person. I am no longer an inferior person. I may act like it every now and then, but I am not.

This new self-image is then accompanied by an active struggle for righteousness. I would be misrepresenting the apostles, though, if I said, “Come to Christ, snap your fingers and every struggle you ever had will blow away, including homosexuality.” That just is not the case. Paul says very clearly in Romans 6, in dealing with the question of sin in a believer’s life, “Yield yourself to righteousness as once you yielded yourselves to unrighteousness.” It involves an active struggle of being a slave to God.

One starts this by an active obedience to stop overt behavior which is wrong. When one comes to Christ, he ends an adulterous relationship because of the new life in Christ. By an act of will, he ends it. By an act of will, he ends the overt homosexuality which he has practiced. That is not to say that there are not strong feelings which are still there—feelings, for example, for another person in an adulterous relationship. Strong homosexual feelings. Those are where the struggle is going to occur, but already God, in Christ, gives you the power and the authority to do it, to break off the overt relationship. That is first, and when that is broken off, one can get the context

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of time to struggle with, also, the new set of disposition and emotions and reality that go into making you the man and the woman that is made in Christ's image and after His heart.

You become implanted into Christ. And you do this in so many beautiful ways. You can't ever really conquer anything through your own power. It is only through your association with Jesus that you become connected with Him. I see myself just holding on to Him and His energy in zapping everything in sight. How do I hold on to Him since I can't physically reach out? They that worship the Father, worship by Spirit, how do we do that? How do we get a hold of Jesus? We talk with Him; that's prayer. We hear from Him; that's His word. And we talk and hear from Him in our relationship with other believers, where we are free, within a small group of believers, to share our deepest needs and struggles and burdens. We also find that, when we're in Christ, inevitably His nature immediately begins to come into us with the desire to give. So no longer are we looking at ourselves as a sick person who needs to continually receive help from others. But we believe, because of Christ, that as sick as we may have been, as bad as we may have been in the eyes of others, Christ now has redeemed us and given us something valid to give to someone else. So no longer are we simply on the receiving end of life. We are now on the giving end. We come into relationship. We become implanted into Christ because of what He's done for us. And as we move together with Him in hearing from Him, speaking to Him, being with His people—and giving of our time, and of our means, and of our talents, to His work, and to His people, and to the world.

I say this seriously. I don't want anything to do with a message that only frees people from the guilt of sin. I don't want anything to do with a proclamation that just gets people ready to die and go to be with the Lord in heaven. I am associated, and I will be associated, with the proclamation of the gospel as has been believed in the Church and preached by the Lord and preached by His followers—that Christ, in addition to saving us from the penalty of sin, also delivers us from

FREEDOM FROM THE POWER OF SIN AND GUILT

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sin's power. We need that message today because in so many areas people—even Christians—have given up and said, “Once you've got that particular form of behavior or that particular habit, I'm so sorry for you. You're a leper. You'll never be cleansed.” That's not the case. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come.

Closing Prayer

Once more we say, heavenly Father, “Jesus is Lord.” We confess it this time with new meaning. When we speak of You as Lord, we think of Your power in the Resurrection. We think of Your power over Satan. We think of how You've been lifted up, high and exalted, above every other name. But now also we see You as Lord over the sin which so easily besets us. We see You as Lord over a fettering chain which is wrapped about the spirit of our life, making us captive. We see You as Lord, breaking that chain and bringing us into freedom. We see You, the risen Christ, today making Your life applicable to each one of us in this room and saying to us that he who has Your life has life more abundantly. That he who the Son sets free shall be free. We confess it with our lips and we praise You that You've brought us into a company of freedom where no longer do we need to be bound by what has held us. But we can, in You, be free. We praise You in this moment for Your work, Your life. Amen.